

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN ISLAMIC DA'WAH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 'AISYIYAH AND MUSLIMAT NU'S ROLE.

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Abstract

This study examines the leadership roles and participation of female preachers in Islamic da'wah and leadership through two of Indonesia's largest Muslim women's organizations, 'Aisyiyah (affiliated with Muhammadiyah) and Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The study aims to critically analyze how these organizations contribute to promoting moderate Islam and empowering Muslim women in modern society. Using a qualitative approach with comparative and exploratory techniques, the research draws on existing literature to highlight the significant roles of women in shaping societal values and nurturing the next generation of leaders. The findings reveal that women play integral roles in da'wah, both as active participants and supporters of their husbands' da'wah initiatives. Their contributions are essential in advancing da'wah activities and reinforcing Islamic teachings in contemporary contexts. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of these organizations in addressing societal challenges, such as promoting moderation and empowering women amid shifting cultural and social dynamics. By bridging gaps in previous research, this study offers new insights into the leadership and contributions of women in da'wah, with both practical and academic implications for contemporary Islamic preaching and community development.

Keywords: Muballighah, Da'wah, Islamic Women's Organizations, Women's Leadership and Empowerment.

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji peran dan partisipasi perempuan dalam dakwah Islam dan kepemimpinan melalui dua organisasi perempuan Muslim terbesar di Indonesia, Aisyiyah (yang berafiliasi dengan Muhammadiyah) dan Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis bagaimana kedua organisasi ini berkontribusi dalam mempromosikan Islam moderat dan memberdayakan perempuan Muslim di masyarakat modern. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif menggunakan teknik perbandingan dan eksploratif, penelitian ini mengacu pada literatur yang ada untuk menyoroti peran penting perempuan dalam membentuk nilai-nilai sosial dan membina generasi pemimpin berikutnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perempuan memainkan peran penting dalam dakwah, baik sebagai peserta aktif maupun pendukung inisiatif dakwah suami mereka. Kontribusi mereka sangat penting dalam mempercepat kegiatan dakwah dan memperkuat ajaran Islam dalam konteks kontemporer. Selain itu, studi ini menekankan pentingnya kedua organisasi ini dalam menghadapi tantangan sosial, seperti mempromosikan moderasi dan memberdayakan perempuan di tengah dinamika sosial dan budaya yang berubah. Dengan mengisi kekosongan penelitian sebelumnya, studi ini menawarkan wawasan baru tentang kepemimpinan dan kontribusi perempuan dalam dakwah, dengan implikasi praktis dan akademik bagi dakwah Islam modern dan pengembangan komunitas.

Kata Kunci: Muballighah, Dakwah, Ormas Islam Perempuan, Kepemimpinan Perempuan

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in Islamic da'wah in Indonesia has become an increasingly important topic in religious, social, and political studies. In this context, two of the largest Muslim women's organizations in Indonesia, *Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah* and *Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)*, have played a significant role in spreading Islamic teachings and promoting women's empowerment. These organizations not only focus on da'wah but also aim to elevate women's roles in social and public life, positioning them as agents of change with a substantial impact on society¹. Amid the evolving social dynamics, these organizations contribute greatly to shaping a moderate Islamic perspective grounded in values of tolerance and gender equality.

The role of women in Islamic da'wah in Indonesia is becoming more dynamic, extending beyond traditional spiritual aspects to include strengthening Islamic teachings that address contemporary challenges. According to Hamid, women within these organizations actively support their husbands in da'wah initiatives, while also assuming leadership roles in social and religious activities. Women's da'wah in Indonesia is increasingly dynamic, not only educating others about religious teachings but also contributing to improving women's quality of life, such as in education, health, and economic empowerment. Therefore, women's da'wah has a broad impact, enhancing both spiritual aspects and social welfare. Additionally, women in these organizations play a crucial role in introducing the concept of moderate Islam, emphasizing religious tolerance and the protection of women's rights².

In many studies, Islamic moderation in Indonesia is seen as key to fostering harmony in a diverse society³. Both *Aisyiyah* and *Muslimat NU* have played a strategic role in promoting an inclusive Islam, highlighting equality, women's empowerment, and the importance of religious education based on moderate values. While many studies have discussed women's roles in da'wah in general, few have linked women's contributions within large da'wah organizations to national leadership and women's empowerment issues. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by exploring how organizations like *Aisyiyah* and *Muslimat NU* contribute to shaping moderate and competitive Muslim women leaders. This study will analyze how *Aisyiyah* and *Muslimat NU* contribute to the development of women's da'wah leadership and social empowerment in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach and comparative techniques, this research will explore the dynamics of women's roles in promoting Islamic moderation and women's empowerment through various da'wah activities undertaken by these organizations.

The focus of this study is to identify women's contributions in responding to existing social and cultural challenges, as well as to explore how women's roles in da'wah can strengthen the values of moderate Islam in Indonesia. Additionally, this research will examine the relationship between women's economic empowerment through programs such as those implemented by *Aisyiyah*, which focus on socio-economic development within Muslim communities, and the role of women in building a more egalitarian social structure⁴. By examining

¹ M Syafi'i, "Transformasi Peran Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Perspektif Muhammadiyah Dan NU," *Jurnal Perempuan Dan Agama*, 2020, 101–20.

² Aisyah Hamid, "Peran Organisasi Perempuan Islam Dalam Dakwah Moderat Di Indonesia. Jurnal Studi Islam," *Jurnal Studi Islam*, 2018, 245–60.

³ S Rohman, "Pemberdayaan Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Studi Kasus Muslimat NU Dan Aisyiyah," *Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial*, 2022, 11–29.

⁴ N Hidayah, "Peran Aisyiyah Dalam Pemberdayaan Perempuan Indonesia," *Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial*, 2020, 123–35.

the contributions of these two organizations, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of women in Islamic da'wah and how they contribute to shaping a more inclusive and just society. The findings from this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic da'wah literature, particularly in relation to women's empowerment and leadership in contemporary social and religious contexts⁵. This study also aims to provide recommendations for advancing more inclusive and impactful da'wah in promoting women's empowerment in Indonesia.

The role of women in Islamic da'wah and leadership has been widely discussed, particularly through the lens of Islamic women's organizations such as 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU. Although these organizations differ in their ideological backgrounds, they have both played a significant role in empowering women within the framework of Islamic teachings. Research on 'Aisyiyah, for instance, emphasizes the dual role of the organization in both the spiritual and economic empowerment of women, which aligns with the modernist Islam promoted by Muhammadiyah⁶. In contrast, Muslimat NU represents a more traditional approach within the framework of Nahdlatul Ulama, focusing on the integration of local culture and community-based initiatives⁷.

Studies on women's roles in Islamic organizations are often viewed within the context of social-political movements. As noted by

Hamid (2018), both 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU have made substantial contributions to advancing moderate Islam, while addressing issues of gender equality and promoting Islamic teachings⁸. The strategies employed by these organizations are rooted in a historical context where balancing religious values with the demands of modern society often requires updating gender roles in leadership and da'wah⁹. Specifically, 'Aisyiyah's approach to economic empowerment through socio-religious initiatives reflects a significant aspect of its modernist ideology, which not only focuses on religious education but also addresses broader social issues¹⁰.

Research also indicates that female preachers (muballighah) within these organizations play a crucial role. A study by Nur (2022) demonstrates how women within these organizations are not only integral to the spiritual lives of their families but also act as key players in spreading the values of moderate Islam to a wider society¹¹. The emergence of female leaders in these organizations marks a significant shift in the perception of leadership within Islam, placing greater emphasis on inclusivity and social justice. According to Syafi'i, this development reflects an ongoing negotiation between Islamic teachings, local traditions, and the demands for gender equality.¹²

Furthermore, the literature reveals that the intersection of gender, religion, and socio-economic status influences how women in these organizations contribute to social change.

⁵Syafi'i, "Transformasi Peran Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Perspektif Muhammadiyah Dan NU."

⁶ Hidayah, "Peran Aisyiyah Dalam Pemberdayaan Perempuan Indonesia."

⁷Syafi'i, "Transformasi Peran Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Perspektif Muhammadiyah Dan NU."

⁸ Hamid, "Peran Organisasi Perempuan Islam Dalam Dakwah Moderat Di Indonesia. Jurnal Studi Islam."

⁹ Rohman, "Pemberdayaan Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Studi Kasus Muslimat NU Dan Aisyiyah."

¹⁰N Hidayah, "Women's Movement in the Framework of Modernist Muslims in Indonesia: Aisyiyah and Economic Empowerment," *Hamdard Islamicus*, 2020.

¹¹H Nur, "Women as Agents of Change: A Comparative Study of 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU," *Journal of Islamic Leadership*, 2022, 101–20.

¹²Syafi'i, "Transformasi Peran Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Perspektif Muhammadiyah Dan NU."

Schielke (2021) and Hidayah (2020) discuss economic, social, and educational programs organized by 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU¹³. These initiatives aim to empower women in ways that go beyond religious obligations, aligning with broader goals of social justice and economic independence. The success of these programs lies in their ability to adapt Islamic principles to contemporary issues faced by women, including access to education, healthcare, and political participation.

Overall, the literature highlights the transformative potential of Islamic women's organizations in reshaping women's roles both in religious and social spheres. These organizations continue to challenge traditional gender roles while promoting a more inclusive and moderate interpretation of Islam, in line with values of equality and empowerment.

Female Preachers

The role of women in Islamic da'wah has been pivotal since the inception of Islam. The support of Siti Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, was essential in spreading Islam worldwide. Women play a crucial role in strengthening the da'wah efforts conducted by men¹⁴. Additionally, women provide spiritual and psychological support to their husbands in continuing their da'wah work and spreading Islamic teachings. Women who understand the importance of da'wah contribute to its progress by offering comfort, assistance, and encouragement.

Islam, as a religion of mercy for all the worlds, facilitates da'wah activities for its followers. The paradigm that da'wah is solely a

male responsibility is incorrect, as the Prophet Muhammad SAW set an example through his wife by ensuring that da'wah was not only the duty of the husband but also the wife. In the case of two major women's organizations in Indonesia, such as 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU, women are expected to be productive, not just handling household affairs but also actively engaging in social and religious activities in the community.

Previous studies have discussed the role of women in the da'wah of Prophet Muhammad SAW, such as the book by Jam'ah (2004), which explores 70 prominent female figures in the Prophet's life, and the work by Althar (2002) titled *Women of Righteousness in the Light of Prophethood*, which discusses the roles of the Prophet's female companions in supporting Islam. However, there are relatively few literary works focusing on the da'wah efforts of female Muslim figures throughout history. Therefore, the role of women in advancing Islam's da'wah is pivotal in the success of da'wah from the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW until today.

The Role of the Prophet's Female Companions in the Success of Islamic Da'wah

The contributions of the Prophet's female companions, known as *Shahabiyyah*, were significant in the spread of Islam. Some of the Prophet's female companions made notable contributions to the growth and development of Islam worldwide. Among the most prominent Shahabiyyah was Siti 'Aisyah, who narrated 2,210 hadiths throughout her life, playing a crucial role in supporting and helping the da'wah of her husband, Prophet Muhammad SAW¹⁵. Thus, the contributions of the Shahabiyyah were

¹³ S. Schielke, "Islamic Women's Organizations and the Role of Female Preachers: A Comparative Study," *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 2021, 82–98.

¹⁴ Rohana, "Dakwah Muhammadiyah Melalui Optimalisasi Peran Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Aisyiyah," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 11, no. 2 (2018): 301–24.

¹⁵ Rabi'atul Aslamiah, "Peran Perempuan Shahabiyyah Dalam Perwayatan Hadits," *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 18, no. 1 (July 7, 2019): 41, <https://doi.org/10.18592/alhadharah.v18i1.2996>.

essential in the success of Islamic da'wah, as evidenced by the spread of Islam across the world with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamiin*.

Other notable Shahabiyyah include Ummu Salamah, who narrated 622 hadiths from her husband, Prophet Muhammad SAW, and Maimunah binti al-Harits, who narrated 94 hadiths¹⁶. Additionally, Hafshah binti Umar bin Al-Khattab, the daughter of Umar, narrated 60 hadiths¹⁷, while Ummu Habibah narrated 65 hadiths¹⁸, and Zainab binti Jahsy narrated 11 hadiths¹⁹. Other wives of the Prophet also played significant roles in narrating hadiths.

The role of Muslim women in da'wah in the modern era is crucial in addressing contemporary challenges. The Shahabiyyah set an exemplary model by actively teaching and narrating the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad SAW, both in response to inquiries and as part of their initiative to share knowledge with the Muslim community²⁰. Their teachings covered various topics, including matters of faith (tawhid), general Islamic practices, social life, family issues such as engagement, marriage, divorce, spousal relationships, child-rearing, and issues closely related to women and family, such as proper ablution, menstruation, post-childbirth practices, *iddah* (waiting period), and more²¹. Therefore, the role and contribution of the Shahabiyyah are essential in the success of Islamic da'wah worldwide up to the present day.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, integrating historical and comparative study methods. The historical study is conducted to analyze previous literature that depicts the development of Muslim women's organizations in Indonesia, particularly 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama, and their contributions to advancing female leadership in Islamic da'wah. Data are gathered from various secondary sources, including books, articles, annual reports, and other significant documents, to illustrate the roles of both organizations in promoting women's empowerment.

Additionally, the comparative study method is used to compare the roles and contributions of the two organizations in female leadership, identifying differences and similarities in their approaches to da'wah and women's empowerment. A thematic analysis technique is applied to identify key patterns emerging from the collected data. Limitations in historical data, such as incomplete archives or biases in available sources, are addressed by utilizing various supplementary sources and confirmations from interviews with experts and relevant figures to ensure the validity of the research findings.

¹⁶ Devi Setya, "Kisah Sayyidah Maimunah, Wanita Sholehah Istri Terakhir Nabi Muhammad SAW," detik.com, n.d., <https://www.detik.com/edu/detikpedia/d-6098524/kisah-sayyidah-maimunah-wanita-sholehah-istri-terakhir-nabi-muhammad-saw> Diakses pada 23 Januari 2024.

¹⁷ Nilam Isneni, "Hafshah Binti Umar, Wanita Mulia Penjaga Al-Qur'an," detik.com, n.d., <https://www.detik.com/hikmah/muslimah/d-6707096/hafshah-binti-umar-wanita-mulia-penjaga-al-quran>. Diakses pada 23 Januari 2024.

¹⁸ Tarmidzi, "Kontribusi Ummahatul Mu'minin Dalam Periwatan Hadis (4) Ummu Habibah Ra," Majalah

Nabawi, 2019, <https://majalahnabawi.com/kontribusi-ummahatul-muminin-dalam-periwayatan-hadis-4-ummu-habibah-ra>. Diakses pada 23 Januari 2024.

¹⁹ "Wanita-Wanita Terkemuka: Zainab Binti Jahsy, Dinikahi Rasulullah Atas Perintah Allah," Republika, 2011, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/ln4yf9/wanitawanit-a-terkemuka-zainab-binti-jahsy-dinikahi-rasulullah-atas-perintah-allah>. Diakses pada 23 Januari 2024

²⁰ Aslamiah, "Peran Perempuan Shahabiyah Dalam Periwatan Hadits."

²¹ Aslamiah.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah Organization

The first religious-based women's organization in Indonesia, 'Aisyiyah, was founded on 27 Rajab 1335 H, or May 19, 1917, coinciding with the Isra Mi'raj of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The establishment of the 'Aisyiyah organization began with the creation of Sapa Tresna in 1914, a gathering of educated women in the Kauman area of Yogyakarta. The founder of Muhammadiyah, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, together with his wife, recognized the need for an organization that would provide access and empowerment for women and children and encourage women to pursue better education, both in general formal education and religious studies. At that time, the prevailing view and social construct was that women did not need formal education. However, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan believed that education was essential to improving the quality of women and their families. The young women involved in this movement were later trained under the guidance of Ahmad Dahlan and his wife, Siti Walidah.

The process of establishing 'Aisyiyah began with a meeting held at the home of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in 1917, attended by K.H. Dahlan, K.H. Fachroddin, K.H. Mochtar, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, and six young women who were Dahlan's trainees: Siti Bariyah, Siti Dawimah, Siti Dalalah, Siti Busyro, Siti Wadingah, and Siti Badilah. This meeting culminated in the decision to establish the first women's organization within Muhammadiyah, and the name 'Aisyiyah was proposed by K.H. Fachroddin. The inspiration for the name came from the story and exemplary struggle of Aisyah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, who was known for her intelligence and competence. If Muhammadiyah means the followers of Prophet Muhammad, then Aisyiyah means the followers of Aisyah, his wife. Both figures serve as an inspiration for the world, with

their harmonious partnership in spreading the Islamic message. The relationship between Muhammad and Aisyah exemplifies a partnership that strengthens and complements each other in delivering Islam to the world, symbolizing the joint effort of Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah. It is hoped that the profile of Aisyah will also reflect the values of the women of 'Aisyiyah.

The establishment of 'Aisyiyah marked an important symbol of the empowerment and leadership of women in continuing the Islamic da'wah. Muhammadiyah's founder, Ahmad Dahlan, emphasized the importance of organizational management with prudence. Furthermore, 'Aisyiyah has played a critical role in supporting Muhammadiyah and spreading Islamic da'wah throughout the archipelago. Nine women were chosen to form the first leadership of 'Aisyiyah, with Siti Bariyah entrusted as its first chairwoman. The other eight members included: Siti Badilah as Secretary, Siti Aminah as Treasurer, Ny. H. Abdullah, Ny. Fatimah Wasaal, Siti Dalalah, Siti Wadingah, Siti Dawimah, and Siti Busyro as supporting members in the development of 'Aisyiyah.

The significant achievement of electing Siti Bariyah as the first chairwoman demonstrates the successful leadership training carried out by Ahmad Dahlan, his wife, and their students. Siti Bariyah's election was based on her contributions and accomplishments, as well as her ability to advance the development of an important organization such as 'Aisyiyah. The role of 'Aisyiyah, alongside Muhammadiyah, is crucial as it teaches that women play an inseparable role in the da'wah efforts made by men, reinforcing Islam's message of gender equality and the involvement of women in addressing communal matters. The presence of 'Aisyiyah serves as motivation for da'wah, as indicated in the Qur'anic verse: "The believing men and the believing women are allies of one another. They

enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.” This verse serves as an important theological foundation, emphasizing that the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil transcends gender and social class. Therefore, da’wah activities in society become a responsibility for the ‘Aisyiyah organization to continue to engage in.

Muslimat NU Organization

The Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization is a socio-religious women’s organization and one of the autonomous bodies of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The Muslimat NU was founded on 26 Rabiul Akhir, corresponding to March 29, 1946, in Purwokerto, Central Java. Now approaching its centenary, the Muslimat NU has grown into one of the largest women’s organizations in Indonesia. The current leadership is headed by Hj. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, who is also the Governor of East Java.

The idea of forming a Muslimat NU organization was first proposed during the 13th NU Congress in Menes, Banten, in 1938, where R Djuaesih and Siti Sarah, two influential women, represented the female members and voiced the importance of women’s participation in the organization. At that time, NU did not have adequate space for women to express their opinions, share ideas, and actively participate in policy-making. This concept, however, sparked significant debate among the participants at the congress. One year later, during the 14th NU Congress in Magelang, a formal decision was made regarding the role of women in the NU organization, particularly in societal work, education, and da’wah. The Muslimat NU, along with Fatayat NU, became an integral part of the

social-religious movements in Indonesia, spreading the Ahlussunnah wal Jama’ah teachings and consistently promoting NU values in society²². The Muslimat NU organization is composed of Muslim women aged over 40 and married, while Fatayat NU comprises younger women under the age of 40.

The Muslimat NU organization focuses on eight key areas: organization and empowerment of members; education and training; socio-cultural and environmental issues; health and population; da’wah and community development; economy, cooperatives, and agribusiness; labor; law, advocacy, research, and development; and international relations and partnership networks. Each of these fields has its own specific focus and workload in the development of members and the broader community.

Discussion

In the context of Islamic da’wah in Indonesia, organizations such as ‘Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU play a crucial role in empowering women and advancing the agenda of moderate Islam. As large organizations, both have extensive networks that enable them to reach various segments of society, provide training, and educate women in various aspects of life, including education, economics, and social roles. The active membership of women in both organizations has significantly contributed to introducing moderate Islamic ideology, which prioritizes peace, tolerance, and social justice²³.

The role of women in leadership within da’wah is also becoming more visible through the increasing number of female preachers (muballighah), who are not only active within the

²²Sofa Marwah, Oktafiani Catur Pratiwi, and Soetji Lestari, “Conceptualizing Muslimat NU Women in Banyumas: A Civil Society Framework” 136, no. Icosop 2017 (2018): 413–19, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icosop-17.2018.65>

²³Hidayah, “Women’s Movement in the Framework of Modernist Muslims in Indonesia: Aisyiyah and Economic Empowerment.”

family sphere but are also involved in spreading Islam in a more inclusive and responsive manner to the challenges of the times. For example, in 'Aisyiyah, women are involved in leadership at various levels, both in the central and regional organizational structures, as well as in da'wah activities that engage local communities. This shows that women's leadership in Islamic da'wah in Indonesia is increasingly being given more space, with more opportunities for women to participate in various sectors of community life²⁴.

Nevertheless, challenges still remain related to gender stereotypes that limit the mobility of women in some segments of society. Therefore, through education and the strengthening of roles in da'wah, these organizations are working to address these challenges by promoting gender equality and introducing more inclusive leadership models, where both women and men have equal roles in decision-making, especially in terms of da'wah and social development²⁵. In this regard, the participation of women in national leadership has also increased, with some members of both organizations occupying strategic positions, both in the legislative and government sectors, strengthening their contributions to national development²⁶.

The increased role of women in leadership within Islamic da'wah is also aligned with the application of moderate Islamic principles that emphasize balance between spiritual and social life. These organizations are not only focused on religious education but also on economic and social empowerment, which are key pillars in building a just and prosperous society. Thus, the role of women in 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU shows that female leadership in da'wah is not

limited to teaching religion but also plays a role in accelerating social change based on moderate and inclusive Islamic values²⁷.

National Leadership of 'Aisyiyah

'Aisyiyah is an important part of Muhammadiyah and plays a crucial role in the Islamic movement in Indonesia, with a focus on delivering da'wah, commanding good and forbidding evil, and renewal based on the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The principle that underpins the establishment of 'Aisyiyah is the movement of progressive Muslim women. This principle serves as a step for 'Aisyiyah cadres to realize the identity of a Muslim who is adaptive, modern, and implements Islamic teachings and da'wah to society.

The 'Aisyiyah organization emphasizes the importance of Islamic da'wah with the principle of Islamic renewal. The umbrella organization, Muhammadiyah, uses progress and modernity as a benchmark. In spreading these ideas both internally and externally to the wider community about reform and efforts to elevate the status of women, 'Aisyiyah published an organizational magazine called *Suara 'Aisyiyah* in 1926. This magazine played an important role in conveying the aspirations of women in society. The unity vision of the women's movement helped the organization gain significant attention from the public through its active participation in the First Indonesian Women's Congress and its

²⁴I Ismail, "Muslimat NU Dan Kontribusinya Terhadap Dakwah Islam Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Islam*, 2018, 45–60.

²⁵N Sumarni, "Moderasi Islam Dan Peran Perempuan Dalam Organisasi Dakwah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Dakwah*, 2017, 142–55.

²⁶M Mubarak, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Organisasi Islam: Studi Kasus Aisyiyah Dan Muslimat NU," *Jurnal Islamika*, 2019, 88–100.

²⁷R Nasution, "Dakwah Islam Dan Perempuan: Tinjauan Perspektif Sosial Dan Politik," *Jurnal Sosial Islam*, 2016, 200–215.

initiative to establish the Indonesian Women's Congress (KOWANI)²⁸.

In its vision and mission, 'Aisyiyah seeks to purify Islamic teachings and implement them in their true form, as well as to realize a civil society. Furthermore, in its century-long development, 'Aisyiyah has spread across Indonesia with leadership at 34 provincial levels, 458 district-level leaders, 3,193 branch-level leaders, 9,781 village-level leaders, and special branch leadership in Egypt, Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Islamabad. The fundamental principle that has allowed 'Aisyiyah to expand throughout Indonesia and internationally is the principle of progressive Islam, which motivates Muhammadiyah- 'Aisyiyah's interpretation of Qur'anic verses that do not differentiate between genders in *da'wah* (gender equality), making it an important characteristic for the movement's cadres.

The understanding of progressive Islam and the importance of education as a primary need for the movement's cadres have led 'Aisyiyah to innovate in organizational activities. This includes pioneering early childhood education in Indonesia with the Froebel School in 1919, now known as TK 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal (TK ABA), literacy education, the establishment of women's prayer halls in 1922, the baby show congress, and other innovative activities that continue to this day. Today, 'Aisyiyah celebrates its one-hundred-year journey, showcasing its significant role in the nation's religious and social development. The leadership of 'Aisyiyah continues to grow, shaping it into a modern women's organization in Indonesia²⁹. Furthermore, 'Aisyiyah's leadership has expanded its influence through individual and

community development in the social and educational fields. The establishment of KOWANI (Indonesian Women's Congress) in 1928 also supported 'Aisyiyah's efforts in combating illiteracy and colonialism in Indonesia, which was still ongoing under Dutch rule³⁰.

The national movement carried out by 'Aisyiyah was driven by social changes aimed at improving the education of the people as a means of social transformation³¹. The women's movement led by 'Aisyiyah was influenced by the emancipation efforts of figures like Kartini, Dewi Sartika, and others³². The presence of 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah serves as a reminder of the important roles of fathers and mothers within families. The roles of mothers and women, previously viewed with discrimination by society at the time, demonstrated that women and mothers are also active participants in decision-making within the family.

The 'Aisyiyah organization provides a diverse range of programs aimed at empowering women and enhancing social welfare. In the field of **Economy and Employment**, it manages 475 cooperatives, 3,235 family business development units (BUEKA), and runs 39 offline and 41 online entrepreneurship schools, with over 6,200 alumni combined. The organization also promotes the *Gerakan Lumbung Hidup* (Sustainable Livelihood Movement) across 442 locations and offers support to 80 migrant workers in East Java. In the **Research and Development** sector, 'Aisyiyah manages 9,800 kindergartens and early childhood education institutions, along with 350 Qur'an education centers.

For **Higher Education**, it operates 10 universities, including *Universitas 'Aisyiyah* (UNISA) in Yogyakarta³³, Bandung, and

²⁸ "Sejarah 'Aisyiyah," Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, n.d., <https://aisyiyah.or.id/profil/>. Diakses pada 23 Januari 2024

²⁹ Muhammad Sungaidi, "Aisyiyah Organisasi Perempuan Modern-FDK," *Jurnal Manajemen Dakwah*. 3, no. 1 (2017): 34–43.

³⁰ "Sejarah 'Aisyiyah."

³¹ Ro'fah, "Posisi Dan Jatidiri 'Aisyiyah" 1 (2016): 1–140.

³² Ro'fah.

³³ "Unisa Yogyakarta Terus Berprestasi Dan Berinovasi Di Tengah Pandemi," *Tribunjogja.com*, 2021, <https://jogja.tribunnews.com/2021/01/28/unisa->

Surakarta. The **Leadership Training** division provides various leadership programs, including *Baitul Arqam* (Islamic and leadership development) and intensive studies. In the fields of **Arts, Culture, and Sports**, 'Aisyiyah promotes religious cultural appreciation and reading programs aimed at fostering intellectual and moral growth. The **Family Counseling and Religious Guidance** division offers community-level services through *Biro Konsultasi Keluarga Sakinah* (BIKSSA), supporting family well-being. Under **Social Welfare**, 'Aisyiyah runs 188 orphanages, 23 facilities for disabled individuals, 214 daycare centers for the elderly, and 26 elderly care homes. Additionally, in **Healthcare**, it manages 20 general hospitals and 50 clinics throughout Indonesia.

Lastly, in **Primary and Secondary Education**, 'Aisyiyah operates 20,125 early childhood education centers, 4,398 schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and 3,904 literacy programs. These diverse services demonstrate 'Aisyiyah's significant role in societal development and the empowerment of women across Indonesia.

Figure 1. Universitas 'Aisyiyah (UNISA) Yogyakarta



Source : Tribunjogja.com, 2021

The Muhammadiyah organization, including 'Aisyiyah, places a high value on education as a means to enhance human development in the future. One of the key

examples of 'Aisyiyah's leadership is its establishment of educational institutions ranging from primary and secondary schools to higher education. A prominent example of higher education is Universitas 'Aisyiyah Yogyakarta. The modern higher education programs initiated by 'Aisyiyah reflect its strong commitment to the advancement of education in Indonesia, particularly for the empowerment of women in the country. This emphasis on education underscores 'Aisyiyah's dedication to creating opportunities for women to access quality education and contribute meaningfully to national development.

Figure 2. Hospital Sarkies 'Aisyiyah Kudus



Source : Gebrak.id, 2023

In the field of public health, 'Aisyiyah focuses on improving healthcare services to make them better and more accessible. The presence of 'Aisyiyah hospitals in various regions across Indonesia highlights its strong commitment to public health. One of the largest hospitals under 'Aisyiyah is the Sarkies 'Aisyiyah Hospital in Kudus, Central Java. Both 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah emphasize the importance of executing community empowerment programs in a comprehensive and modern manner. As a result, every program launched by 'Aisyiyah is of high quality and demonstrates total dedication to the well-being of the community³⁴.

yogyakarta-terus-berprestasi-dan-berinovasi-di-tengah-pandemi diakses pada 25 Januari 2024.

³⁴ "Telan Biaya Hampir Rp 350 Miliar, Muhammadiyah Bangun Rumah Sakit Megah Dan Terbesar Di Kudus,"

Muhammadiyah has recognized several prominent women as National Heroes for their contributions to Indonesia. One of the figures is Hj. Siti Walidah, the wife of Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah. She was officially recognized as a National Hero by Presidential Decree Number 42/TK on November 10, 1971. Another significant figure is Fatmawati Soekarno, the wife of Soekarno, Indonesia's first president. She was honored with the National Hero title through Presidential Decree Number 118/TK/200 on November 4, 2000. These women played vital roles in the development of Indonesia, particularly in supporting the movements of Muhammadiyah and the nation's independence³⁵.

National Leadership of Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

The Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization is an inseparable part of the larger body of Nahdlatul Ulama. As the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia today, the role of Nahdlatul Ulama is crucial in contributing to the development of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia³⁶. The role and contributions of Muslimat NU provide valuable lessons on the importance of religious moderation through the approach of Ukhuwwah Islamiyyah and religious tolerance³⁷. The journey of Nahdlatul Ulama, which once had political affiliations and later became non-political, holds significant meaning in showing how the spirit of unity and harmony has never faded through the changing times.

The Muslimat NU organization has undergone six leadership periods over time. The first chairperson of the PP Muslimat NU was Chodijah Dahlan (1946-1947). This was followed by Yasin (1947-1950), Hj. Mahmudah Mawardi (1950-1979), Hj. Asmah Syahrani (1979-1995), and Hj. Aisyah Hamid Baidlawi (1995-2000). Currently, the leadership of Muslimat NU is held by Hj. Khofifah Indar Parawansa (2000-present), who is also the governor of East Java province³⁸. Based on the internal conditions of Muslimat NU, the estimated number of members today is around 32 million, spread across 34 regional leaders at the provincial level, 532 branch leaders at the district/city level, 5,222 sub-branch leaders at the subdistrict level, and 36,000 branch leaders at the village level.³⁹

The central leadership of Muslimat NU is divided into nine key areas: organization and member empowerment; education and training; socio-culture and environment; health and population; da'wah and community development; economy, cooperatives, and agribusiness; labor; law, advocacy, research and development; and foreign relations and partnership networking. The organizational structure of Muslimat NU is quite complex, with each sector being led by competent and influential figures in their respective fields. As such, the leadership of Muslimat NU holds significant influence and structure as the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia.

Services and Programs of Muslimat NU

Gebrak.id, 2023, <https://www.gebrak.id/2023/06/telan-biaya-hampir-rp-350-miliar.html> diakses pada 25 Januari 2024.

³⁵ "Tokoh Dan Kader Muhammadiyah Yang Menjadi Pahlawan Nasional," UNISA Yogyakarta, 2023, <https://www.unisayogya.ac.id/tokoh-dan-kader-muhammadiyah-yang-menjadi-pahlawan-nasional/>.

³⁶ Marwah, Catur Pratiwi, and Lestari, "Conceptualizing Muslimat NU Women in Banyumas: A Civil Society Framework."

³⁷ Yuyun Rohmawati and Ahmad Barizi, "RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN THE RECITATION ACTIVITY OF MUSLIMAT NU: An Effort to Prevent Religious Extremism," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 22, no. 2 (2021): 360–76, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v22i2.14092>.

³⁸ "Sejarah Singkat Muslimat NU," Muslimat NU, 2024, <https://muslimatnu.or.id/> Diakses pada 23 Januari 2024.

³⁹ See at: [https://muslimatnu.or.id/sejarah-singkat/#:~:text=Jumlah%20Anggota%20Muslimat%20Nahdlatul%20Ulama,\(Tingkat%20Kelurahan%20%2F%20Desa\)](https://muslimatnu.or.id/sejarah-singkat/#:~:text=Jumlah%20Anggota%20Muslimat%20Nahdlatul%20Ulama,(Tingkat%20Kelurahan%20%2F%20Desa).).

Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) offers a wide range of services and programs aimed at improving the welfare and development of its members and society. These services are organized into several key areas:

1. **Social and Health Services:** Muslimat NU runs 104 orphanages, 10 female dormitories, 10 elderly care homes, and 108 health service centers. These facilities provide care and support for children, the elderly, and those in need of healthcare services.
2. **Educational Services:** Muslimat NU manages 9,800 Kindergartens and Raudhotul Athfal (TK/RA), 350 Qur'an Education Centers (TPA), and 6,226 Early Childhood Education Centers (PAUD). These educational programs are designed to promote early childhood education and religious learning for young children.
3. **Cooperative Services:** Muslimat NU operates one central cooperative, An-Nisa, along with 9 secondary cooperatives, 144 primary cooperatives with legal status, and 355 Cooperative Service Points (TPAK). These cooperatives aim to empower members economically through collective business ventures and financial services.
4. **Skills Development Services:** The organization runs 11 Vocational Training Centers (BLK), which provide training to enhance the skills of individuals, particularly in areas that support economic independence and social development⁴⁰.
5. **Hajj Guidance Services:** Muslimat NU also offers 146 groups for Hajj pilgrimage guidance, ensuring that members receive proper religious education and assistance for their spiritual journey to Mecca.

Through these services, Muslimat NU plays an essential role in supporting the welfare,

education, and economic empowerment of its members, contributing to the betterment of society at large.

Figur 3. Vocational Training Center - Balai Latihan Kerja (BLK) Muslimat NU di Purbalingga



Source : Diskominfo Purbalingga, 2023

The programs initiated by Muslimat NU are aimed at grassroots communities (middle to lower class) and address urgent needs. Several programs launched by Muslimat NU effectively address societal issues. One of the standout programs from Muslimat NU is the Balai Latihan Kerja (BLK), implemented in various regions across Indonesia. The objective of the BLK program is to prepare prospective workers, particularly women, with the necessary skills to enter the workforce. This program seeks to enhance human development by improving skills, which in turn positively impacts the economic situation of its members. One example of this initiative is the BLK Community in Purbalingga, which has received recognition from the local government for contributing to increased job opportunities for the community.

These women made significant contributions to the political landscape of Indonesia. Asmah Sjachrunie was active in South Kalimantan, while Mahmudah Mawardi contributed in Central Java. Mariam Kanta

⁴⁰G P R Kominfo, "GPR Kominfo Bupati Tiwi : Muslimat NU Berperan Penting Mencetak Generasi Unggul," 2024, 4-7, <https://www.purbalinggakab.go.id/info/bupati-tiwi->

[muslimat-nu-berperan-penting-mencetak-generasi-unggul/](https://www.purbalinggakab.go.id/info/bupati-tiwi-) diakses pada 25 Januari 2024.

Sumpena worked across both Central and West Java, and Marjamah Djunaidi played a pivotal role in East Java. Lastly, Hadinijah Hadi Ngabdulhadi was also a notable figure from East Java. These women not only shaped the political history of their respective regions but also played an important role in the development of NU's involvement in Indonesian politics. Their leadership and influence highlight the early participation of women in political activities within the NU movement⁴¹.

The Role and Participation of Female Preachers in National Leadership

The contribution of women to national leadership is demonstrated through their involvement in leading organizations and holding strategic positions. Women are often entrusted with responsibilities and specific roles to create policies that address the needs of society. They are given the space to work in their fields and contribute to national development. In the field of da'wah, women have access to teaching in schools, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), mosques, and other community activities⁴². In social services and healthcare, women are actively involved in activities such as posyandu (integrated health posts), health clinics, and public health centers (Puskesmas).

In politics, the Indonesian constitution provides a 30% representation for women in the legislative bodies, allowing them to engage in politics and lead the community (Kurniawan, 2014). Therefore, the significant contributions and roles that women play in the national sphere

draw attention and provide space for women to express themselves and hold strategic positions in the government.

Several prominent female political figures fought for Indonesia's independence, such as Sultanah Safiatuddin from the Aceh Sultanate in 1641, Cut Nyak Dien from Aceh, Kartini from Jepara, Opu Daeng Risaju from Palopo, South Sulawesi, Rasuna Said from West Sumatra, Admiral Malahayati from Aceh, Siti Walidah (wife of Ahmad Dahlan, founder of Muhammadiyah), and Rahmah El Yunusiyah from West Sumatra. These figures all contributed to the independence and national development⁴³.

Although the contribution of women in Islamic da'wah through organizations such as 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU has become more significant, structural and cultural challenges remain as the main obstacles to promoting gender equality in leadership. In many areas, patriarchal traditions still dominate, limiting women's access to strategic positions within organizational structures. This aligns with Hidayah's (2020) finding that although many women are active in various da'wah activities, they are often hindered from occupying top leadership positions.

Additionally, while the moderate da'wah promoted by these organizations has positively impacted the creation of peace and tolerance, its implementation is sometimes uneven. Ismail (2018) emphasizes that many women still struggle to balance domestic roles with their da'wah activities. In this regard, it is important to review the support mechanisms and training provided by these organizations, ensuring that women have adequate space to develop their leadership capacities⁴⁴. It is also essential to

⁴¹ Ayung Notonegoro, "Inilah Para Politisi Perempuan NU Generasi Awal," 2017, 1–6, <https://www.nu.or.id/tokoh/inilah-para-politisi-perempuan-nu-generasi-awal-9z95r>. diakses pada 26 Januari 2024.

⁴² Rohana, "Dakwah Muhammadiyah Melalui Optimalisasi Peran Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Aisyiyah."

⁴³ "Mengenal 8 Pahlawan Muslimah Masa Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Indonesia," Istiqlal, 2021, <https://istiqlal.or.id/blog/detail/mengenal-8-pahlawan-muslimah-masa-perjuangan-kemerdekaan-indonesia.html> Diakses pada 24 Januari 2024.

⁴⁴ Ismail, "Muslimat NU Dan Kontribusinya Terhadap Dakwah Islam Di Indonesia."

recognize the role of young women in the transformation of da'wah and leadership in the future. According to Sumarni, young women involved in da'wah organizations need more intensive training to prepare them to become visionary and adaptive leaders in the face of changing times⁴⁵. This includes education that not only focuses on religious teachings but also on leadership, communication, and managerial skills relevant to contemporary social and political challenges.

Another major challenge is how to create a more inclusive system that not only involves women in administrative positions but also in strategic decision-making processes. This can be achieved by giving women more opportunities to engage in discussion forums, policy formation, and important decision-making at both the national and global levels. Nasution (2016) argues that if da'wah organizations open the doors to more female participation in strategic decisions, moderate Islamic da'wah will become stronger and more relevant to the times. By optimizing training, increasing leadership opportunities, and reducing social and cultural barriers, women in da'wah organizations can become more effective agents of change. Therefore, it is crucial to implement a more holistic approach to women's empowerment, from economic, social, and spiritual aspects, so that they can play a maximal role in building a more just and prosperous society⁴⁶.

CONCLUSION

The role of women, not only as a central part of household life but also as a significant force in the movement and continuity of da'wah, has had a profound impact. Women play a crucial role as supporters of the da'wah efforts carried out by their husbands. A wife's role as a place for

discussion and exchange of ideas is essential in ensuring the success of da'wah. This is evidenced by the significant contributions made by the female companions (shahabiyyah) and the wives of Prophet Muhammad SAW, such as Khadijah during his prophethood, and Aisyah, who is among the most prolific narrators of hadith from the Prophet. Therefore, the role of women in da'wah has been actively carried out since the early spread of Islam by Prophet Muhammad SAW.

In the contemporary era, the role of women in da'wah is carried out through community-based organizations. As two of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), both contribute to the da'wah movement initiated by women through organizations such as 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU. These two major women's organizations in Indonesia have been instrumental in spreading Islam in their own distinctive ways through various programs. The da'wah movements carried out by these organizations encompass diverse fields, including social welfare, politics, economy, health, and education. All of these focus areas aim to implement Islamic teachings and improve the quality of human life.

'Aisyiyah, as an important part of Muhammadiyah, focuses on the modern development of its members. Therefore, its da'wah efforts are based on contemporary knowledge and target the needs of modern society. The programs generated by 'Aisyiyah include early childhood education (Taman Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, PAUD), basic to higher education affiliated with Muhammadiyah, health services through hospitals, as well as research and development and community economics. On the other hand, Muslimat NU

⁴⁵Sumarni, "Moderasi Islam Dan Peran Perempuan Dalam Organisasi Dakwah."

⁴⁶Mubarak, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Organisasi Islam: Studi Kasus Aisyiyah Dan Muslimat NU."

targets grassroots communities. The programs developed by Muslimat NU reach even the most remote areas, with the organization's offices extending to rural villages. This widespread reach is a hallmark of Muslimat NU's ability to engage various elements of society. Some of the organization's flagship programs include social welfare services, such as orphanages, and programs aimed at improving the skills of prospective workers, exemplified by the presence of Balai Latihan Kerja (BLK)

The contribution of women to da'wah in Islam, both in its early stages and in the contemporary context, is significant in shaping the direction of da'wah movements. Women are not only supporters but also leaders in the da'wah movement through major organizations such as 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU. These organizations play a role in spreading moderate Islamic values, with programs that are relevant in the fields of education, health, economy, and social empowerment. These programs demonstrate how women in da'wah contribute to social development and the advancement of society, while also advocating for gender equality within the framework of moderate Islamic teachings.

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